



Speech by

# GORDON NUTTALL

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

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Hansard 8 December 1999

## VEGETATION MANAGEMENT BILL

**Mr NUTTALL** (Sandgate—ALP) (4.10 p.m.): There have been calls from the Opposition today for us to withdraw this legislation. In my contribution I will advance an argument for why we need to pass this legislation today. The farmers say that there have to be guidelines for tree clearing. The Greens say that there have to be guidelines for tree clearing. The Federal Government says that there have to be guidelines for tree clearing. The only people who appear to say that there should not be any guidelines are those in the Opposition. I think that is a sad state of affairs.

Farming groups such as the Queensland Farmers Federation have acknowledged the need to temper some of the past excesses. The president of the Queensland Farmers Federation, Richard Armstrong, has said—

"I think all responsible farmers would say today we cannot go on clearing until the last tree falls."

The irony of the State coalition's staunch opposition to this legislation is the fact that it is the National/Liberal Federal coalition that is pushing for this legislation to be put through this Parliament today. Here we have the Queensland branches of the Liberal and National Parties saying that they are not prepared to go along with their Federal colleagues in Canberra in terms of guidelines for tree clearing. I think that in itself is a sad irony.

States such as Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales all have clearance control legislation and have had it for a couple of years. All of the mainland States have legislation regarding tree-clearing guidelines.

**Mr Reeves:** Some were Liberal Governments.

**Mr NUTTALL:** Indeed. Some of them, back in 1997 when that legislation was passed, were conservative Governments. All we are doing is bringing this State into line with what is happening around the rest of Australia. We need to put that into perspective.

I, along with many others, have received letters, faxes and phone calls from various people in the bush regarding this legislation. I do not particularly wish to name the person, but I received some advice about a fire warden in central Queensland who said that on 24 November he had issued a permit to allow 500 hectares of scrub to be burnt. That same person who was granted the permit has now burnt out some 20,000 hectares. That is indicative of the problem and that is why we need to pass this legislation today—to stop this sort of misbehaviour. I would be the first to say that the majority of land-holders are responsible people.

I have also received a letter from some people out at Goondiwindi who said that the majority of land-holders agree that we do need some clearing guidelines but that they do not need to be draconian. I agree with that. This legislation is not draconian. If members sit down, look at the legislation in perspective and evaluate it, they will find that it is not draconian legislation.

When we sit down around the table with all of the parties and we are unable to reach consensus, what alternative do we have to introducing the legislation and getting on with the job?

There is none. We as a Government have to make the decision. The parties have come together and the parties have not been able to reach a consensus on this, so at the end of the day we as a Government have a responsibility to introduce the legislation relating to tree-clearing guidelines.

That is something the Opposition walked away from when it was in Government. It cannot deny that it simply walked away and was not prepared to make those tough decisions when it was in Government. That is a sad state of affairs. It had the opportunity when it was in Government. It chose not to take up the cudgels.

**Mr Hayward:** You could tell from their speeches today that they could never have made the decision.

**Mr NUTTALL:** The difficulty with Oppositions members' speeches is that there was nothing constructive in them. All I heard was why this legislation is so bad. I have not seen one member of the Opposition stand up in this place today and say, "This is what needs to be done. This is what we propose. We have a range of amendments that we will move." Instead of reducing the list of speakers, getting into the clauses, debating some amendments and trying to get some changes made, all they have done is stand up and berate the legislation. That is simply indicative of the fact that the Opposition is a policy-free zone. Again I say that that is an extremely sad state of affairs.

There are a number of other comments I would like to make, but I understand that the member for Moggill wants to make a contribution before the close of the debate.

**Mr Hayward:** What about that comment by the member for Callide?

**Mr NUTTALL:** We often see the member for Callide stand up and speak in this place. I would rather play the issue than the person, but I say to the honourable member for Callide that he does himself, his party and his constituency no justice by standing up here and making the bitter attacks he continues to make on the Government instead of offering constructive criticism and constructive alternatives to the legislation that is before the House today.

I say in closing that it is not easy. This is a difficult piece of legislation, but it is legislation that needs to be passed. If it is not passed today, we will see a continuation of panic tree clearing in our bush. That is the last thing we want to see. We do not want to see what has happened in other States; we want to see sustainability for the good of this State, for its long-term future.

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